

REMARKS

This application has been reviewed in light of the Office Action dated June 28, 2004. Claims 1-103 are presented for examination. Claims 1, 23, 33, 55, 65 and 83 have been amended. Claims 1, 23, 33, 55, 65 and 83 are in independent form. Favorable reconsideration is requested.

The Office rejected claims 65-82 under 35 U.S.C. §101, as directed to non-statutory subject matter. In response, claim 65 has been amended to recite as discussed above, steps carried out by a server on a network. Claim 65 is now believed to be appropriately limited by language within the technological arts, and therefore in full compliance with Section 101. Claims 66-82 depend from claim 65, and are therefore also believed to be in full compliance with Section 101. Applicant respectfully requests the Examiner to remove the Section 101 rejection.

Claims 1-103 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over U.S. Patent No. 6,064,978 (Gardner). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

As recited in independent claim 1, the present invention relates to a server on a network. The server receives from a first participant a formulation of a problem, and receives from a plurality of other participants suggested solutions to the problem. In accordance with a salient aspect of the claim 1 invention, before it is determined that the problem has been solved, a portion of the award is distributed to at least one participant who contributed a suggested solution to the problem. This novel technique provides incentives to participants to suggest intermediate solutions that advance the problem towards a final one.

Independent claim 23 relates to a terminal on a network. Independent claim 33 relates to a system for facilitating problem solving. Independent claim 55 relates to an apparatus for facilitating problem solving on a network, and is drafted in means plus function form. Independent claim 65 relates to a method for facilitating problem solving over a network, and is drafted in term of steps carried out by a server. Independent claim 83 relates to computer code executable by a microprocessor for facilitating problem solving on a network. Each of those claims recites the salient features discussed above with respect to claim 1, namely the posting of a problem, the receipt of suggested solutions and the distribution of a portion of the award, before it has been determined that the problem has been solved, to at least one participant who contributed a suggested solution.

It has become fairly well-known to utilize the Internet for problem solving applications. In a conventional arrangements, a user having a question posts it on a Web site, where it may be viewed by other users, who then provide answers in response. To provide incentives to users to submit answers, it is known to offer an award, such as a monetary award, to the user who provides the final and correct one.

While generally for some intended purposes, the existing schemes suffer drawbacks, stemming from the fact that they do not give an award to a user providing an answer until the answer is considered to be complete. This approach under-values the importance of intermediate answers, which while not providing the actual and final solution, may very often give some direction towards the final solution, and which therefore constitute an important, and in many cases crucial, part of the problem solving process. Despite the importance of such intermediate answers, however, the conventional techniques provide insufficient incentives to users to submit them.

• The present invention overcomes this drawback by distributing a portion of a total award before it has been determined that the problem has been solved, to at least one participant who contributed a suggested solution. By using this approach, a participant who, for example, does not know the ultimate solution to the problem, but does have a partial solution, or an idea for moving towards a solution, is given a sufficient incentive to provide it.

Gardner relates to a computer networked question and answer system. In the system of Gardner, an asker A publishes a question and assigns it a number of points N. The asker A receives comments on his question, and with each comment received determines whether it constitutes all or part of the answer. If a comment does constitute all or part of an answer, A assigns a quantitative evaluation (e.g. a letter grade or numerical score) to the comment. The process continues until the answer is deemed complete, at which stage points are actually awarded to those who submitted comments, using the quantitative evaluations as a weighting factor.

Significantly, in Gardner, no points are awarded to anyone until the answer is deemed complete. Although the asker can assign a quantitative evaluation factor to an answerer B who provides part of the answer, that assignment is not an award of any type. In fact, it is not even a guarantee that an award will be given for the partial answer, since the asker in Gardner may reevaluate the evaluations that he has already made. See Gardner at col. 3:37-38; Fig. 1, step 108. Thus, Gardner, like all of the conventional prior art, simply does not provide an effective incentive to submit intermediate solutions.

In the present invention, in stark contrast, a portion of the award is distributed before it is determined that the problem has been solved, to at least one

participant who contributed a suggested solution. By distributing a portion of the award in this fashion, before the problem is solved, the present invention provides a concrete incentive to submit an intermediate solution. Because this feature is neither taught nor suggested by Gardner, Applicant respectfully submits that Gardner cannot possibly render obvious the present independent claims.

The remaining claims all depend from one of the independent claims discussed above, and each partakes in the novelty and non-obviousness of its respective base claim. In addition, each recites additional patentable features of the present invention, and individual reconsideration of each is respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully requests passage to issue of the present application.

Applicant's undersigned attorney may be reached in our New York office by telephone at (212) 218-2100 or by facsimile at (212) 218-2200. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address given below.

Respectfully submitted,



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